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The Sin and Mischief of Inordinate
SELF-LOVE.

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S E R M O N

Preached before the

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MAJESTY.

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PHIL. ii. 21.

All seek their own, -----



HERE is hardly any thing more generally complained of, and yet so generally practised by all sorts of Men, as an inordinate seeking their own private temporal Interest. All are ready to condemn it, though but few can justify themselves from partaking, in some measure, of the Guilt of it. This is the *Root of all our Evils*, of our personal Injuries and publick Mischiefs, of that Contempt of God and his holy Worship, and of those notorious Violations of all the Laws and Rules of Religion and Conscience, which are the just Reproach of our degenerate Age. It therefore highly becomes and behoves us to do all we can, in our several Stations, to extirpate so noxious a Vice, which hath thus over-run the *Vineyard of the Lord*, and brought forth such pernicious Fruit : For this Cause I have chosen

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these Words of the *Apostle* for the Subject of my present Discourse, *All seek their own*—. And shall,

I. Explain the Nature of the Sin complained of in the Text. And,

II. Propound some Arguments and Considerations, which may be proper to dissuade us from this most unchristian Practice.

I. I shall explain the Nature of the Sin, which St. Paul complains of in the Text; *All seek their own*, their own Things, their own Profit, Pleasure, Credit, or Advancement, some private secular Interest of their own. To do this, is not absolutely unlawful. A Man is not obliged to lay aside all Regard to himself, never to have any Aim at the Improvement of his Estate and Condition in the World, or to refuse all the most fair Opportunities of gratifying his own innocent Inclinations and Affections. We are to make the Love of ourselves the Rule and Measure of our Love to others; and therefore we may, yea and ought to have some Respect to our own Interest, even such as may be a fit Pattern for us in seeking the Good of others. However, there is a *seeking of our own Things*, our own private temporal Interest, which is very sinful, and justly condemned in the *Text*; of which I shall consider these following Instances. When we seek our own Things, without a due

Regard

Regard to the Things of God, to the publick Good, or the Good of other particular Persons.

First, When we seek our own Things, without a due Regard to the Things of God, his Glory, the Interest of his Kingdom, and of true Religion and Virtue ; this is that *seeking their own* Things, which St. Paul more particularly accuseth and condemneth the Men of his time for ; *All seek their own, not the Things which are Jesus Christ's.* And this Men are guilty of,

I. When they are so intirely taken up with pursuing their own private Interest, that they seem to have cast off all Regard to God ; when they grudge the spending any of their Time in the Worship and Service of God, or in promoting Religion and Piety, as Exercises impertinent and insignificant to any of those Designs, which they are concerned for the accomplishing of ; when they care not how God is dishonoured, or what Reproach they bring upon the Gospel of Christ, so they can but thrive in their Estates, or rise in Preferments, or gratify their own Lusts or Passions ; when they make no Scruple of trampling upon any of the Laws of God, which lie in the Way wherein they are prosecuting their selfish Designs ; or will not interpose their Endeavours to curb the Insolence of Prophaneness and Vice in others, for fear of lessening their Interest in the Enemies

Enemies of God and Religion. In all such Cases as these, Men are notoriously guilty of a sinful *seeking their own Things, and not the Things of God.* And also,

2dly, When though they seem to have some regard for the Things of God, yet they are more earnestly concerned in promoting their own temporal Advantage. They do not *first seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; they are hearty, vigorous and unwearied in the pursuit of some worldly Interest; but they are Cold and Negligent, Faint and Weary in the Service and Worship of God: Like those covetous Jews, who said, *When Amos viii. 5. will the New Moon be gone, that we may sell Corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth Wheat?* They long to return to their more agreeable and gainful Employments. If they part with any of their Substance for such Uses, whereby God may be honoured, it is given *grudgingly and as of Necessity*; But they can freely and chearfully lay it out to feed their Lusts, to gratify their Pride or Revenge, or to serve the Ends of their Ambition. If they have Power or Authority delegated to them, they are, with some Difficulty and Reluctance, brought to improve them to the Honour of God, and the *Maintenance of true Religion and Virtue*, but they readily employ their utmost Skill and Industry to manage them so as may be most for their own Profit and Advantage. In all such Cases, Men are manifestly guilty of the Sin

Sin condemned in the *Text*, of seeking their own things, and not the things which are God's. For if we seek any thing more than these, with our first and best Endeavours, such an inferior Regard to him, to his Glory, and the Interest of his Kingdom, will be as nothing in God's Account; or rather, he will reject it with Indignation, as an high Affront offered to him, in thus preferring the *Creature before Him* our *Creator*, God Blessed for evermore.

3. When Men put on a *Form of Godliness*, and make a shew of Zeal for God and Religion, but chiefly seek their own Temporal Interest, by all their outward Expressions of Piety and Devotion. This was the Case of the Scribes and *Pharisees*, against whom so many Woes were denounced by our Blessed Saviour. They *fasted often*, and *prayed long*, and were very zealous for the strict Observation of the Sabbath, and the external Rites of the Jewish Law: But there was nothing but Self-Interest at the Bottom of all this; they were all this while serving their Covetousness and Ambition. They had regard not to God's Glory, but to their own; *they did all their Works to be seen of Men*, and to receive Praise and Benefit from them. If we spend never so much Time in the Worship of God, contend never so earnestly for the Faith, and plead never so warmly for the Support and Interest of the Church of Christ, we are all this while seeking our own Things, and not the Things which are God's; if

if the carrying on any selfish, worldly Design, be the chief End of our Religious Zeal and Performances, we serve not, as St. Paul speaks, *our Lord Jesus Christ, but our own Bellies, our own Lusts, and Interests.* We do not serve God, but seek to serve ourselves of him, and horribly profane his holy Things, by using them to such vile Purposes. I shall now consider,

Secondly: The Sin of the Text, as it may signify the seeking our own things, without a due regard to the publick Good.

1st. Men are notoriously guilty of this, when they care not what publick Mischief they do, so that they can but promote some private Interest of their own. When, for the gratifying their own private Revenge, or the getting into a Place which another Man possesseth, or for the purchasing the Applause of any discontented Party of Men, they foment Disorder and Divisions in the Church, Tumults and Factions in the State, or do any thing prejudicial to the publick Peace and Welfare. When they excite or propagate groundless Fears and Jealousies, Murmurings and Complaints, whereby they discourage and weaken the Hands of those who have the Administration of publick Matters, and give great Advantage to our common Enemies; that they may gain the Reputation of wise and zealous Patriots, or be thought worthy to be taken off from doing Mischief,

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of Inordinate SELF - LOVE. 9

Mischief, by something which may gratifie their Avarice and Ambition. When they despise Dominions, and speak evil of Dignities, and endeavour to bring Contempt on their Ecclesiastical or Civil Governours, to the great Damage both of the Church and State, because they are not preferr'd by them, according to the Value which they put upon themselves. In all such Cases, which are but too common, we act from a Principle which is extremely opposite to that tender and affectionate Regard which we ought to have for the Peace, and Safety, and Happiness of that Body, of which we are Members, and are highly guilty of an inordinate *seeking our own Things*.

2dly, When the publick Good is little or no part of our Concern. When we are so wholly taken up with *seeking our own Things*, that whatever our Capacities, or Opportunities, or particular Obligations are, to do publick Good, we grudge the spending any of our Time, or Care, or Labour for it. Whereas the more common Good is the greater Good, and therefore requires our first and chief Regard. The Health and Security of the whole Body ought to be preferr'd, by every Member of it, before its own single Ease and Benefit. If those who are the Ministers of the Gospel should suffer their Thoughts and Endeavours to be taken off from advancing the Kingdom, and edifying the Body of Christ by an eager Pursuit of their own

own temporal Benefit or Preferment: If they should *forsake*, as *Demas* did, or do the important Work of their Sacred Office negligently, that they might be more at leisure to enjoy the Profits of it, and more closely *embrace this present World*: If Magistrates and Officers of Justice should neglect the necessary and useful Business of God's Ministers for the Publick Good, to *do Justice and Judgment, to punish evil doers*, and to protect and encourage *them that do well*, that they might prosecute their own private Affairs, consult their own Ease, follow their Pleasures, or secure themselves from the Hatred and Censures of unruly and wicked Men: If any of these, or any others in a more private Station, for any selfish Respects, will not do what is proper for them, to support the Government, to defend their Country, to promote the Publick Peace and Welfare, and the Reformation of *a crooked and perverse Nation*, of which they are Members, that so *Iniquity may not be its Ruin*: All these would evidently be guilty of *seeking their own Things*, without a due Regard to the Publick Good. I shall now consider,

3dly: The Sin of the *Text*, as it may signify the *seeking our own Things*, without a due Regard to the Things of other particular Persons. This we are guilty of, not only when we seek our own private Benefit, by doing any Wrong or Injury to our Neighbour; but

but also, when, out of any selfish Regard, we neglect the doing any of those good Offices for him, which Christian Love and Charity oblige us to. When we prefer any little Interest of our own, before a manifestly greater Interest of our Neighbour: When the Interests are equal, we may prefer our own, before that of another single Person; and if they interfere, our *Charity* will be allowed to *begin at Home*. But the Case is otherwise, where our Neighbour's Interest is apparently greater than ours. We must not prefer our own Superfluities before his Necessities, or refuse to take off from our own Abundance, to relieve the Wants of an indigent Brother. We must not, for any little Advantage to ourselves, neglect to assist and succour him in his great Distress. That *Charity* which St. *Paul* prefers before all other Graces and Virtues, without which Faith is vain, and Hope Presumption, he tells us, *Seeketh not her own*: It is exercised in parting with something from ourselves for the Benefit of another, in employing our Time and Care, and Substance, *as we have Opportunity*, in doing *good to all Men*, without any sinister respect to our own Temporal Advantage.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the Nature of that Sin complained of in the *Text*; and to shew what that *seeking our own Things*, in Opposition to the Things of God, the Pub-

lick Welfare, and the Good of other particular Persons, is, which we ought carefully to avoid.

And if we seriously consider what hath been said, we cannot but observe how justly the same Complaint may be made against us at this Day, that *all seek their own Things*. St. Paul did not mean this of every particular Member in the Church. He gives a very different Character of *Timothy* and *Epaphroditus*, in this very Chapter; and many others there were, at that time, of the like Temper: He therefore only means, that a great many were infected with this Vice; that there were but few, in comparison, who were not in some measure obnoxious to this Censure. And we have reason to hope it is no otherwise to be applied to us. We have some glorious Instances of a different Spirit. We have seen the most agreeable private Satisfactions neglected, for the sake of our common Safety and Happiness, *a Minister of God for Good, attending continually on this very thing*. We have also an admirable Example before us of such a stedfast Regard for God, the true Religion, and ~~and~~ a good Conscience, as the most tempting Offers, even of the highest Titles and Dignity, were not able to shake or weaken. We have some who generously refused, or lost the most alluring Objects of Covetousness and Ambition, rather than comply with any thing which tended to the weakening our

our Security of that Settlement, which we now most happily enjoy; and, by the Blessing of God, hath been effectually defended against all the Attempts of *unreasonable and wicked Men* to subvert it. These Instances I have mentioned for the same Reason, for which St. Paul thought it not indecent to commend even himself, and to *magnify his own Office*, *That if by any means I might provoke others to Emulation*. For after all, we cannot surely but take so much Shame to ourselves, as to confess, That the Sin of the *Text* is but too visible in the Practice of too great a Part of all sorts of Men. Hence it is that we oftentimes consider not so much the Reasonableness and Justice of an Undertaking, as the Interest which Men have in it, when we would judge of the Sincerity of their Profession to engage heartily therein. How few are to be found, who, in good earnest, prefer the Honour of God, the Interest of true and substantial Religion, and the publick Good before their own private Advantage? To what can we attribute all our Seditious and Rebellious Disturbances, but to the Endeavours of Men to gratify their Revenge for the Disappointment of their Covetousness or Ambition? By what little private Considerations are our unhappy Divisions kept up, and the Church and Nation exposed to all the fatal Consequences of a *Kingdom's* being *divided against it self?* What manifest Violations of all the Laws of Justice and Charity do we see every Day

Day practised, in order to the raising an Estate? How Mercenary are our Shews of Friendship and Love, and how backward are we in doing any Kindness to another, where we can *hope for nothing again?* And how seldom are Mens Favours conferred for the Sake of such Merit only, by which they have no Interest of their own served? How mightily hath this narrow unchristian Spirit prevailed amongst us, to the Dishonour of Almighty God, to the Reproach of our holy Profession, and to the apparent Hazard of our Common Safety, and our most valuable and publick Blessings? Let us then do all we can in our several Places to expose and correct this so prevailing a Principle, inordinate Self-love, which is so heinous in its Nature and so pernicious in its Fruits, and let us effectually root it out of our own Minds and Practice. Let us not *seek our own Things* only, but also *the Things of Jesus Christ* and the Publick Good; and *as we have Opportunity, to do all the Good we can to all Men.* And for the inforcing of this Exhortation, I proceed,

2ly, To propound some proper Arguments and Considerations.

1st. Let us consider the Example of our Blessed Lord, whose Name we bear, and whose Disciples and Followers we profess ourselves to be. He *sought not*

Joh. viii. 10.

not his own Glory. He did not his own Will, but the Will of his Father Joh. vi. 38.
that sent him. He came down from Heaven to redeem and save a lost World. For our Sakes he became Poor, that we, through his Poverty, might be Rich. He took upon him the Form of a Servant, that we might be made the Sons and Daughters of the Lord Almighty. Acts x. 28.
He went about doing Good, all manner of Good both to Bodies and Souls of Men; and at length, humbled himself and became obedient unto Death, the painful and ignominious Death of the Cross, that he might obtain for us a most Glorious, a most Happy, and Everlasting Life. Such a Charitable, Beneficent, and Generous Spirit was our Blessed Lord of. *Let the same Mind then be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.* Let us esteem it as our greatest Glory to be thus like unto the Son of God, to shew forth the same Virtues, which adorned the Life of the best and greatest Man that ever appeared in the World, who is adored in all the Assemblies of the Saints, and whom the Angels of God worship. In vain we call ourselves his Disciples, whilst we act upon such mean and selfish Principles, as are so directly contrary to that Zeal for God, and Love to Men, which influenced all his Actions. We dishonour him we call our Lord and Master, and that holy Religion we profess, and deceive our own Souls, when we presume to say we abide in him, and rely upon him for Salvation, if we will

will not be perswaded to walk as he walked,
and have nothing of this Spirit of Christ in us.

Secondly, Let us consider, and set before us the Example of the holy Apostles, Men of like Passions with ourselves, whose Memories are honoured to this Day throughout all the Christian World, for their Zeal for God and Religion, and a generous and hearty Concern for the Good of others. They freely left all they

*had to follow Christ. They sought
1 Cor. 10. 33. not their own Profit, but the Profit*

of many, that they might be saved. They became all things unto all Men, that

2 Cor. 1. 22. they might save some. They made themselves Servants to all that they might gain the more. They gladly did

*1 Cor. 9. 19. spend and were spent for the sake
of Christ, and his Church. They*

underwent Bonds and Imprisonment themselves, in seeking to redeem others from the Slavery of Sin and Satan. They travelled thro' the World to shew and guide in the way of Life and Salvation, those who walk'd in Darkness, and were hastening to Destruction. They

*Acts 20. 24. counted not their Lives dear unto
themselves, so that they might fi-*

*nish the Ministry they had received of the Lord Jesus, and fill up the Measure of his Sufferings for his Body's sake the Church. What noble, generous, and publick-spirited Men were these? How effectually did their Zeal for
God,*

God, and their Love to Mankind, stifle all selfish Considerations, mortifie their Affections to the most alluring Objects of this World, and make the most painful Labours, and Losses, and Sufferings, for the sake of *Christ* and his *Church*, Matter of their Glory and Rejoicing? And have not we the same Lord, and the same Laws? Are not we Professors of the same Religion, and under the same Obligations? Do we not call ourselves by the same Name, and pretend to the same Hopes? But, alas! how little of their Spirit is to be found amongst us? By what different Principles are Men generally moved? By what contrary Rules are their Practices directed? And should they not blush and tremble to think of such apparent Hypocrisy in their Profession, and Deceitfulness of their Hopes? Can we presume that the same Reward will crown such contrary Endeavours, that we shall reap the same Glory and Happiness, by *seeking our own* Things, our own private secular Interests, which they have obtained by slighting all these for the Service of God, and their Generation?

Thirdly, Let us consider how prejudicial this sinful *seeking our own* Things is, even to our own real Interest in this present Life, which the selfish Man hath all his Thoughts upon. For,

1st. It may reasonably deprive us of the Support and Assistance, the Affection and Good-will of other Men, which may be of great Use and Advantage to us. Who will seek the Advancement, or endeavour to prevent the Fall of one, who regards no body but himself, who cares not what becomes of all the World, so he can but raise his own Fortunes? How unworthy will such Men appear of their Wealth and Preferments? And how few Friends will they find in the time of need? Who will plead or intercede for them? Who will lend a hand to support them in that Station, wherein they are useless to all but themselves? But the generous, charitable, and publick-spirited Man will find many, who will help to uphold him in his Prosperity, and to relieve him in his Wants. His Fall will be looked upon as a common Calamity; and his Defence and Relief, as the common Duty of all Men: And no Man's *Mountain is so strong, that it cannot be moved.* No Man is so self-sufficient, but, at one time or other, he may stand in need of the Friendship, the good Word, and Assistance of others.

2dly. It may justly provoke God to engage his Providence in blasting our Designs for our own Interest. How can we expect his Blessing upon our Endeavours for Riches or Preferment,

ferment, when we have no Design to make that Use and Improvement of them, for which he puts such Talents into our Hands? And if he should think fit to try us with them for a while, if we hide them *in a Napkin*, and only please ourselves with the Possession of them, or use them altogether in private Satisfactions, how reasonably may we fear that he will soon *take them away from us, and give them to those who will use them to better Purposes, more agreeably to his Will, more for his Honour, and the Good of his Family?* Or he may punish our Abuse of his Bounty and Goodness to us, with some other Calamity, which may spoil the Relish of all our Enjoyments, and make us say with *Haman*, in the Height of his Prosperity and Advancement, *All this availeth me nothing.* But how successful soever the selfish Man may be in seeking his own Things, and how long soever he may possess the Fruit of his Endeavours: Yet,

Esth. 5. 13.

3dly. He deprives himself of the best and greatest Pleasures of a prosperous State, the Pleasure of doing more and greater Good than others, of being more eminently serviceable to the Honour of God, and the Interest of his Church and People, the Pleasure which results from the Testimony of a good Conscience, the Sense of God's particular Favour and Blessing,

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and the Hope of a great Reward in Heaven; from the Imitation of the Divine Beneficence, and a Conformity to the most Excellent and Happy Being, in that which he esteems his greatest Glory, *in Being and Doing Good*; Pleasure which will live in the very Agonies of Death, when all the pleasing Objects of Sense and Appetite shall have lost their Relish, when Men are falling down apace from those high Places to which they were advanced, when we are parting with all our Earthly Substance, and going as *naked* out of the World as we *came into it*; what can we look upon with so much Joy and Satisfaction then, as that Power, and Wisdom, and Honour, and that Part of our Estates with which we served God and did good?

Lastly, Let us consider how destructive this sinful seeking our own Things is, to our best and greatest Interest, our everlasting Happiness in another World. There the *unprofitable Servant* shall be cast *into outer Darkness*, and *he shall have Judgment without Mercy who shewed no Mercy*, who had no regard for any

Luk. xvi.

but himself. We read of a certain Rich Man, who made no other use of his Wealth, but to *cloath himself in Purple and fine Linen, and to fare sumptuously every Day*; but we also presently read of his being in Hell, *lifting up his Eyes in Torment*, and

and as fruitlessly begging for a Drop of Water, as Lazarus seemes to have done for the Crumbs which fell from his Table. And such our Saviour tells us will be the end of all those selfish Men, who lay up Treasure for themselves, and are not Rich towards God; who regard nothing but the private Benefit of their publick Stations, who hide or misemploy the Talents which God hath given them to improve to his Glory, and the Good of his Church and People: To all these the great Judge of the World will say, *Depart from me, ye Cursed, into Everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* This will be the Doom of all such slothful and *unprofitable Servants.* Is it not a foolish miserable Self-love, which ingageth us in such a seeking our own Things, as will undo us for ever? Let us then root out of our Hearts this dangerous Principle, and not suffer this Guilt to abide upon us, of *seeking our own Things, to the Prejudice, or with the Neglect of the Things of God, and our Brethren.* Let us every one, in our several Places, by a due Employment of those Talents which God hath intrusted us with, heartily endeavour to promote the Honour of God, the Publick Peace and Welfare, and, as we have Opportunity, to do Good to all Men. This is the true way of *seeking our own Things, our highest and everlasting Interest;* for God will not forget our Works of Faith and Labours of Love; that which

which we have done for his Name, for his Church, and for his Servants sake; but at the Last and Great Assize, when we must all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, he will say unto us, Well done, good and faithful Servants; having been faithful in a few Things, he will make us Rulers over many Things; he will make us Partakers of all the Glories and Treasures of Heaven, and thenceforth we shall be for ever happy in the Joy and Presence of our Lord.

F I N I S.



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